



MAGAZINE

The Zorkendorfers' Wyoming Home

Rico and Joanne Zorkendorfer build their young family's dream house — long, lean, and environmentally discreet — on the edge of Wyoming's most famous valley.

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Perched on a butte that overlooks the mountain-ringed Wyoming valley known as Jackson Hole, Joanne and Rico Zorkendorfer's family getaway feels like an observatory. One's gaze is constantly drawn outside, taking in epic views that forge a deep sense of connection with the natural world. The long, low house has an organic quality, too, made of stone and wood and sited so sensitively, Joanne says, that it "almost disappears into the land."

Designed by Fiona McLean, a principal of the London architectural firm McLean Quinlan, the house perfectly answers the Zorkendorfers' request for a true refuge. "The brief was for a house that felt restorative, serene, and elemental," says Joanne, the founder of Olli, a San Francisco firm that specializes in home furnishings using robes de llengües textiles from Mallorca and Otomi embroidered fabrics from Mexico.

Given the couple's cultural roots—Joanne was born and raised in New Zealand, and Rico, an industrial designer at Apple, hails from Munich—Jackson Hole's at-



traction is obvious. “It reminds us of our homelands,” Joanne says as she recounts their first winter vacation there, in 2011. They casually looked at some real-estate listings at the time, the most arresting being a log cabin that occupied an extraordinary position on four elevated acres. The cabin, built a few decades ago, was in poor condition, but the Zorkendorfers saw the potential in replacing it with something new and original for themselves and their growing family (they now have a young son and daughter). A few months later, the property was theirs, and ideas began to percolate, fueled by historic alpine architecture, especially the warm, earthy buildings of the Engadin region of Switzerland.

“I have a love affair with New Zealand’s wide-open beach houses, and Rico has an affinity for chalets, so we wanted to create something that was a marriage of those two things,” Joanne explains. And it turned out that a number of their favorite houses had been created by McLean Quinlan. “What was appealing to us about Fiona,” she adds, “is her ability to create new buildings that feel as though they have been around a long time but are also ageless.”

McLean was struck by the magical site and spent some quality time in the area studying what would become her creative touchstone: the J. P. Cunningham Cabin, an 1880s ranch house in what is now Grand Teton National Park. There the rooms flank a breezeway left open on the ends so livestock could take shelter. That visit reinforced McLean’s concept for the Zorkendorfers: a central living space bordered by expanses of glass and accessing intimate zones for dining, napping, and the like. Everyone agreed that stone would be used for the exterior of the house, which is tucked into the hill, beneath a shingled roof.

“The stone gives the house a European feel in some ways and also this sense



of sitting very firmly in the landscape,” McLean observes. (Skilled stonemasons and artisans erected the house over two years, with breaks for the winter months.) Indoors, the materials are organic and plainspoken, though so perfectly joined and finished as to be poetic. Fir and hemlock predominate, their golden tones complemented by more stone and pebbles sourced from the Snake River, a waterway that whiplashes across the valley below.

“We wanted a very clear, simple architectural language and to not overcomplicate things,” the architect explains. “Limiting the palette of materials helps hugely.” Olli ottomans add yet another layer of craftsmanship to the proceedings, as well as some discreet dashes of non-neutral color. Rico also conceived and made several of the home’s elements, notably the shapely wood door handles.

The main family space, where sliding glass windows access plank terraces, is open-plan. Seating and dining areas flow into a kitchen outfitted with a breakfast nook, a snug morning destination that frames a breathtaking vista. At one end of



the multifunctional gathering place soars a double-sided fireplace that warms the adjacent family room, too. This level of the house also features a bunk room for the kids and their friends (it can sleep eight in a pinch) and a master suite. A spa with a steam room and a sauna are located on the lower floor, joined by a guest bedroom and a study.

The Zorkendorfers spend almost every vacation here, and as many long weekends as they can manage. Skiing, hiking, and mountain biking are always on the agenda, but it's the relationship to nature—direct and vivid—that is especially savored. Elk and deer amble constantly into view, providing endless opportunities for the children to break out their sketch pads, while owls, bald eagles, and red-tailed hawks dart overhead. Then there are the moose that occasionally settle down at the base of the stone walls, warming themselves in the sun as the Zorkendorfers and their kids, wide-eyed, look on.

"It's a privilege to live in Jackson Hole," Joanne says. "We are surrounded by national parks, and there is an incredible Native American history here too. Building a house in an area like this demands that you create something really special."